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Spring 5-1-2020

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Recommended Citation

Morehead, Madison and Andrade, Jessica, "Effects of Representation in Media on Race Perceptions" (2020). *Symposium on Undergraduate Research and Creative Expression (SOURCE)*. 859.
<https://scholar.valpo.edu/cus/859>

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Effects of Representation in Media on Race Perceptions

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Abstract

This study examined the impact that television platforms have on perpetuating the stereotypes assigned to minority groups by majority groups, specifically among young adult populations. Previous studies have focused on the impact of misrepresentation in the media on individuals that identify with minority groups. However, this study assessed the impact of television platforms on minority groups' internalized perceptions of self. It also assessed the impact of television platforms on majority groups' implicit bias based on the quality and quantity of representation consumed. We hypothesized that the more exposure people have to positive representation, the less implicit biases they will have against minority groups. Online surveys were sent to students at multiple universities in the Northwest Indiana region. Students' watching habits were compared to both implicit bias and internal perception of self.

Introduction

Background Facts

There has been both stagnation and progress in representation in recent years. There has been an increase in representation in the Black community as they make up 13% of the population and 16% of characters in television. For other minority groups, they are disproportionately underrepresented. Researchers found that minorities seeing themselves portrayed as strong, positive characters reduces implicit bias and has a positive impact on those in minority groups.

Research Questions

Does exposure to quality and quantity media representation have an influence on the majority population's perceptions of minority populations? Does exposure to quality and quantity media representation have an influence on minority's perception of themselves?

Hypotheses

More exposure to quality and quantity media representation will decrease the majority population's bias of minority populations. Because of mis- and underrepresentation in the media, minority individuals experience lower self-esteem than majority populations.

Methods

Likert scale and qualitative analysis questions were used in Qualtrics to create the survey. This survey was sorted into four portions: Demographics, Media Consumed, Identity of Self, and Opinions. Snowball sampling was used in order to receive more participants. A flyer describing the survey was shared on Instagram and Twitter and sent to Valparaiso University student organizations across campus. We also offered an incentive of a \$25 Amazon gift card for all completed surveys. All data from the survey was entered into Jamovi and correlation matrices were used to compare watching habits to identity of self and race perceptions.

Results

- 61.9% of individuals that filled out our survey did not identify as a minority while 23% did, 10.6% somewhat did and 4.4% somewhat did not.
- Low correlations were found between perceived identity as a minority and self-esteem as well as race perceptions. This may be because majority of individuals that participated in our survey identified as White.
- Multiple significant moderately positive correlations were found that proved when individuals' identities are accurately portrayed in media, they seem to be more proud of these identities, which proved to be significant among minority populations as well.
- Significant moderately positive correlations also proved minority populations who were proud of how their identities are portrayed in media also felt more influenced to act similarly to characters that they closely identify with.
- Individuals who regularly watch The Office and The Bachelor presented more negative bias towards minority populations.
- Individuals who did not present bias towards either population watch a variety of shows

Conclusion

Many findings from this study supported our hypothesis that majority populations have a bias towards minority populations and minority individuals experience lower self-esteem than majority populations. However, there was no significant data that supported that media was the primary cause of this. Therefore, from this study we found that media alone does not have a significant impact on race perceptions in the United States. Further studies should look at underlying factors other than media that may contribute to how members of majority and minority groups perceive themselves and one another.

Implications

This study has important implications on how racial biases are formed and how more positive and accurate portrayals of minority groups on television platforms have the potential to shape better race relations in the future. This study may aid in guiding further research on the way minorities are represented and perceived by the majority. This may imply that there is a need for more diverse television series with positive portrayals of minorities because of the influence it has on self perceptions. However, our research does not indicate that media produces racial bias.

Limitations

Our survey was answered by 131 people. However, not all surveys were completed. This could be due to test fatigue and an unawareness of all four sections of the survey. Also, receiving completed surveys proved to be difficult. This could be because of questions pertained to race/ ethnicity that may have made participants uncomfortable. Initially, other Northwest Indiana schools had agreed to participate in the survey. However, because of COVID-19, universities backed out of the survey because of the transition to online classes. The survey may be un-useful to certain extent because of the small number of participants and less representation of minority perceptions.

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